

STATEMENT OF SENATOR SLADE GORTON
CHAIRMAN, AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
AVIATION SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
ON THE MODERNIZATION OF THE AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEM
FEBRUARY 26, 1998

Good afternoon. Our focus today is on modernization of the air traffic control system - a process that has been ongoing for the last 15 years, and will continue many years into the future.

The modernization program is at a critical juncture. We don't have time for the program to continue the "stops and starts" of the past. Improvements must be on track or, as the National Civil Aviation Review Commission warned us last December, the growing demand for air services combined with outdated equipment will soon bring the system to gridlock.

I am encouraged that the FAA is working with industry to put the program on track. To focus the program. To develop a reasonable plan to deliver equipment, on time and on budget, that will provide what users need. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on progress in developing this consensus.

The FAA plans to spend billions of dollars over the next few years to modernize the air traffic system. Users will also spend a great deal of money to purchase and install the components needed in their aircraft to use new systems. We need to do it right.

I also look forward to discussing the FAA's progress in dealing with the Year 2000 problem. The FAA has identified air traffic equipment that must be fixed, including the HOST computer, which provides information to controllers on the position of aircraft. I have made it clear that I believe that the FAA must act now to replace and integrate the HOST computer system before 2000. Yet I have no assurances that a definite course has been set, or that the Administration has the funds in place. We have no choice but to

pay for whatever fixes are needed. Of course, the budget is tight. I'm looking for a clear picture on the costs for Year 2000 fixes, and when the fixes will be completed.

It is not my intention to take a confrontational stance with the FAA on this issue. I look forward to working with Administrator Garvey to facilitate the needs of the FAA while ensuring that this issue, which has far reaching safety and economic implications, is dealt with in a timely manner. It is imperative that the FAA make the most out of limited time and resources, and ensuring that this happens will be my number one aviation priority during the second session of the 105th Congress.

Although the Year 2000 problem has been looming for some time, it has come more into attention as people have actually been affected. I'm sure many of you are aware, for example, of cases where credit cards with expiration dates in 2000 have not worked, even after the card processing equipment had supposedly been fixed. The public is aware of the Year 2000 problem and must be assured beyond any doubt that it will be possible to fly and, most important, that it will be safe to fly on January 1, 2000.

Again, I look forward to the suggestions of people who are going to appear on the panels today, those of you who are interested participants, and obviously my colleagues to make sure the modernization program is moving in the right direction.